

New Hampshire Department of Education Special Education Program Approval Report

SAU 34 Hillsboro-Deering School District

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Final Report August 27, 2001

**Visit Conducted on:
May 14-15, 2001**

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New Hampshire Special Education Program Approval Report

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(Commendations, Citations and Suggestions for each school)

Note: *It should be noted that suggestions are not considered corrective actions and therefore are given as technical assistance. The district is not mandated to implement them.*

New Hampshire Special Education Program Approval Report

SAU 34

I. INTRODUCTION:

A New Hampshire Department of Education Special Education Program Approval visit was conducted in SAU 34 comprised of the following schools: Hillsboro-Deering Preschool, Hillsboro-Deering Elementary School, Washington Elementary School, Hillsboro-Deering Middle School and Hillsboro-Deering High School. The visiting team met on May 14-15, 2001 to review the status of special education services provided to eligible students.

It should be noted that the Hillsboro-Deering School District started out the year participating in the yearlong Special Education Monitoring and Improvement Process (SPEDMIP). They formed an IDEA team, chose a facilitator and met several times during the school year. The focus questions developed for the process was:

How are we meeting the current educational needs of our students admitted to our school programs and how can we be more effective in transitioning the students into the least restrictive environment?

The IDEA team had also developed parent, student and teachers surveys and collected data from these groups. However, due to several events beyond their control, the team was not able to continue meeting and therefore were not able to meet the deadlines for completing their work and writing the final report. As part of the process, the district chose the option to have an external team conduct the compliance review and write the compliance report. The "compliance review team" also included members from the Hillsboro-Deering School District, one of whom was a member of the IDEA team. Although the IDEA team did not complete all of the activities of the SPEDMIP process, it is commendable that the district has committed to reviewing the data they gathered to attempt to answer the focus question and to make a plan for improvement as a result of their findings.

Activities related to the compliance review included the close review of the application materials, teaching certification of special education staff, analysis of SPEDIS data and random inspection of student records. Interviews were held with the Superintendent, Director of Student Support Services, building principals, regular and special education teachers, paraprofessionals and related service personnel as time and availability permitted. Team members also observed children and programs. The team did not contact parents, since the district had surveyed parents. The results of their survey will be included in a report they write about their yearlong SPEDMIP activities. Throughout the visit, the team had the full cooperation from school personnel and this helpfulness was greatly appreciated.

The report that you are about to read represents the consensus of all the members of the visiting team. Please keep in mind that this is a "report for exception", meaning that only exceptions to the NH State Standards have been addressed. If a component is not mentioned, that does not mean that the team did not review it; it just means that there were no citations of noncompliance to the Standards found in that particular area.

II. STATUS OF PREVIOUS ON-SITE: *Conducted on March 14-15, 1995*

Significant issues from the previous review visit included an extremely high rate of teacher, administrator and paraprofessional turnover. Special education children did not have access to computers and the district needed to develop programming for its emotionally disabled population. Files were in disarray, missing many components and there was no clerical assistance for special education throughout the district. In addition, staff was in need of professional development and support.

Overall, SAU 34 had made significant growth in program improvements, including many innovative programs, since the 1995 compliance visit. They now have a full time Special Education Director and a full time administrative assistant. They have hired their own certified speech, psychology, PT and OT staff, and are no longer relying on consultants. The number of students requiring special services has decreased somewhat, as has the number of students in out-of-district placements. Although the district does not have a separate program for emotionally disabled students, there is an alternative general education program at the high school. Whether this program meets the needs of this population should be reviewed by the district. The district has a preschool program that is currently segregated, but is working with Headstart to collaborate on more inclusive practices for preschool children with special needs. Also, as part of a Barbara Bush grant, specialists visit the homes of preschool children to share and model literacy programs. One school offers a playgroup program where parents of disabled and non-disabled children participate with their child in a literacy program in the kindergarten room.

The district should be proud of the many general and special education initiatives they have developed in the last few years. The Master Plan for Professional Development is exemplary, as is the School and Community Communication and Resource Guide. This is a district where parents and community are involved in the education of its citizens.

The team would like to recognize and reinforce the philosophy, vision and goals each school is working toward and commend them for their support of quality services to all children. It is clear that staff in the Hillsboro-Deering School District are a dedicated, hard working, collaborative group of professional and paraprofessional people.

III. ISSUES OF SIGNIFICANCE:

While it is evident that much progress has been made in the district since the last visit, there remain issues that need to be addressed. Teacher and paraprofessional turnover is still an issue, however the district is attempting to find ways to attract and retain qualified staff.

Space continues to be a major problem throughout the district. All but one of the schools is faced with inadequate space for programs. The removal of the preschool program from the elementary school to a location far from the community and without access to non-disabled children is out of compliance with FAPE. Moving the program to a school or a place in the local community should be a priority. Specialists are seeing children in inappropriate spaces, and teachers and paraprofessionals have no place to work and collaborate. One middle school program is based in the elementary school because there is no space for it in the middle school.

During interviews with staff, the issue of a lack of resources to work with children was identified. Adequate materials, equipment, curriculum resources and technology (computers and software) would benefit all programs and children.

The district has provided many opportunities for staff development, however some staff indicated a need for continuous training and for common planning time between general and special education staff. This would allow for better dialogue, communication and teaming between the groups.

IV. COMMENDATIONS, CITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS: SAU-WIDE

COMMENDATIONS:

- Staff throughout the district, including paraprofessionals are dedicated and qualified.
- Increasing certified professional staff since last review and an effort to hire and retain quality people.
- Many excellent initiatives have begun in the district, in both general and special education.
- The preschool and early childhood programs are commendable.

CITATIONS:

While it is obvious that children are receiving services outside the district, in general, out-of-district files were missing required components. Evaluations were not current, there was no indication that parents received their rights with notices, written prior notice was missing from files and it was hard to determine if parents were involved.

Other citations are listed by individual schools below.

SUGGESTIONS:

There are no SAU-wide suggestions. See individual reports for building suggestions.

Preschool Program

Programs: 1) Headstart 2) Washington Street School

of Files Reviewed: 2

COMMENDATIONS:

- Preschool services are provided by a dedicated, hard working collaborative group of professionals including the preschool staff and administration.
- The preschool team recognizes its need for growth and is moving in the direction of improved services for its students.
- Strong collaboration with the Head Start to better meet the needs of all children (transportation, holding slots).
- Preschool works very collaboratively with parents and is very family centered. IEP development begins with asking parents what their goals are.
- Barbara Bush Early Literacy Grant provides great opportunities for children and their families, particularly those at risk.

CITATIONS:

- Ed. 1109.04 2 files: lacked evidence of parents are receiving procedural safeguards at each *notice* of meeting.
- Ed. 1109.01(f) 2 files: No statement in one file of how the child will advance toward the goals and be involved in the general curriculum.
- Ed. 1109.03 1 file: lacked evidence of regular educator on the team.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Preschool program currently is a self-contained, segregated program with no opportunity to interact with typically developing peers. It is strongly suggested that the preschool return to the elementary school and incorporate at least a 50-50 ratio of typically developing/coded children in the preschool.
- The preschool room is a long distance from the bathroom and does not have accessible water. There is no playground or outdoor space. A more suitable location would result in improved programming for the children.
- There are very few social opportunities for preschool children. Providing activities for families would increase chances for social interaction.

Hillsboro-Deering Elementary School
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Programs: 1) Modified Regular 2) Resource Room 3) OT, Speech & Language

of Files Reviewed: 3

COMMENDATIONS:

- Staff are supportive and eager to help each other out.
- There is a willingness of the regular and special education staff to work together.
- Staff are knowledgeable, proud of their work and are involved the class room as well as the resource room.
- Staff work to the best of their ability and with a positive manner in such a small space.
- Inclusion within the school was not only supported, but also welcomed by regular education teachers.
- Students are provided services within the classroom as much as possible
- District is willing to try new ideas (Handwriting without Tears, sensory integration, etc.).

CITATIONS:

Ed. 1109.04 3 files: Procedural safeguards not given at each *notice* of meeting.
CFR 300.504

SUGGESTIONS:

- Consider smaller caseload for case managers, perhaps 1 grade level.
- Provide a space for specialists to work adequately with one or more students and a place to store their equipment (in the building).
- Provide a place where sensory integration can be performed to the utmost advantage to all students.
- Teachers feel the need to be supported by administration.
- There is a need for updated technical education supplies, materials, equipment and testing materials.
- Consider changing the format of IEPs so they will be easier to follow.

Washington Elementary School

Programs: 1) Modified Regular 2) Resource Room

of Files Reviewed: 3

COMMENDATIONS:

- There is exceptional communication between staff members.
- A full range of support services are available to students.
- The school provides a nurturing environment for students, and staff.
- All identified students are integrated in regular education class with pullouts.
- Class sizes are small and there is additional support staff in each classroom.
- Spanish is provided for all in half hour classes twice per week.
- The literacy program is balanced with reading instructions to all students K-5.
- Special education director/teacher in building is extremely helpful to families, even providing transportation to and from meetings.

CITATIONS:

Ed. 1109.04 3 files: procedural safeguards not given at each *notice* of meeting.
CFR 300.504

Ed. 1109.03 2 files: no evidence of LEA representative at the IEP or placement meeting.
CFR 300.344

SUGGESTIONS:

- Paraprofessionals could use and receive more case specific training regarding children assigned to their case.
- Guidance counselor (part time) difficult to familiarize self with IEP goals. Perhaps expand position to enable greater participation in IEP social/emotional development.

Hillsboro-Deering Middle School

Programs: 1) Regular Ed. Classes 2) Life Skills Program

of Files Reviewed: 3

COMMENDATIONS:

- Files were very organized.
- Staff are open, pleasant, and receptive.
- The middle school seems to be striving towards improvement.
- The school principal is open, honest and willing to give plenty of time to special education.
- The school is commended for the goal of Differentiated Instruction training to all teachers and involving all students.
- Middle school does a great job working with regular education teachers to get out bi-weekly progress reports.

CITATIONS:

Ed.1109.04 3 files: lacked evidence that procedural safeguards were sent out with *notice* of CFR 300.504 meeting

Ed. 1123.14 3 files lacked record of disclosure including name, date and purpose of disclosure.

Ed. 1109.03 3 files: lacked evidence of regular education teacher at Evaluation and determination meeting.
CFR 300.344 1 file: lacked evidence of regular education teacher at IEP and placement meeting.

Ed. 1123.05 3 files: lacked evidence that annual notice of rights/procedural safeguards were given.

Ed. 1109.03 1 file: lacked evidence of LEA representative at meeting.
CFR 300.344(d)

Ed. 1109.11 2 files do not show progress to the extent to which it is sufficient to achieve goals by the end of
CFR 300.347 the year.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Increase special education staff to allow special education teacher more time with students and less on paperwork.
- Increased communication and/or training regarding students in LIFE program with regular education teachers.
- More communication with LIFE program and regular education teachers regarding who is responsible for modifying class work.
- Consider more training for support staff in the LIFE program.
- Provide coverage/support for LIFE program teacher and support staff to meet on a regular basis.
- Separate space for OT, PT as well as more centralized location for the LIFE program.

Hillsboro-Deering High School

Programs: 1) Life Room 2) Resource Room 3) Modified Regular Classroom

of Files Reviewed: 3

COMMENDATIONS:

- The special education team is highly motivated, dedicated, loyal, creative, flexible and work well as a team.
- The LIFE Skills program incorporates weekly team meetings including special ed staff, paraprofessionals, OT, PT, school psychologists, parole officer, police dept. representative and representative from Vocational Rehab. office.
- Special education resource room and office located centrally, near regular education classrooms.
- Progress reports and performance verification are sent to parents every week.
- Communication between regular and special education teachers is wonderful.
- Classroom teachers are willing to modify tests and quizzes.
- The guidance counselor knowledgeable about special education law and the community.
- Courses are offered to paraprofessionals, including stipends and tuition.

CITATIONS:

<u>Ed. 1125.04</u>	1 file: lacked evidence of consent to evaluate.
<u>Ed.1107.02(b)</u>	1 file: lacked evidence, upon referral, of written prior notice to parents.
<u>Ed. 1107.02(d)</u>	1 file: lacked evidence of disposition of initial referral to parents.
<u>CFR 300.504</u>	1 file: lacked evidence of procedural safeguards given to parents.
<u>Ed. 1107.05</u>	1 file: evaluation not conducted within 45 days.
<u>Ed. 1107.07</u>	No individual certified in the area of suspected disability present at eligibility meeting.
<u>Ed. 1109.03</u>	No regular education teacher present at IEP/placement meeting.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Provide space for school psychologist to test and for special education team meetings.
- Staff and students would benefit from updated computers, software and materials.
- Special education secretary should have access to a computer, which includes confidentiality.
- More staffing would allow for team planning time, better special education coordination and addressing programming for students with emotional disabilities.
- Consider alternative programming, including classes in social skills, for students who are potential dropouts or who have behavioral issues.
- Consider giving students credit toward graduation for courses taken in the resource room.

ADDENDUM

JAMES O. MONITORING PROGRAM

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Student File Review

Case Study Document

Reimbursement Claim Form

Case Study Addendum Form

<p style="text-align: center;">ADDENDUM JAMES O. MONITORING PROGRAM</p>

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NUMBER OF FILES REVIEWED: 2

COMMENDATIONS:

- Both files were in order, with up to date IEPs and evaluations.
- Parent, school and court involvement was evident.
- Both students are receiving the services outlined in their IEP.

CITATIONS:

RECOMMENDATIONS: